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SOVIET BLOC MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO
UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES

One important aspect of the Soviet Bloc's aid to underdeveloped countries has been its program of medical assistance. This has been particularly true in the more backward countries where the Bloc has found the offer of medical facilities a convenient opening move for its aid program.

Bloc aid in the medical field has been extended in several forms. In some cases complete hospitals have been built, equipped and staffed. In other cases, equipment for existing hospitals or for medical schools has been provided. In still other cases, doctors or medical technicians have gone to underdeveloped areas to help staff hospitals, to work as public health officers, or to teach. The Bloc has extended medical facilities and technical aid both as outright gifts and in the form of long-term credits. The following paragraphs summarize the principal transactions and offers that have taken place.

Afghanistan: In March of 1956, the USSR presented as a gift to Afghanistan medical equipment adequate for a 100-bed hospital. This material has been installed at the Kabul Hospital. Also in 1956, a Soviet Medical Mission visited Afghanistan to study medical organization and training. This was followed by the visit of an Afghan medical mission to the USSR. One result of this exchange of missions was an offer by the USSR of 10 medical scholarships for Afghan students. Still another gift of medical equipment came from the Chinese Communists. In June of 1956, China presented the University of Kabul with x-ray machines and other equipment. One, and possibly more, Russian professors of medicine are teaching at Kabul University.

Burma: In January 1957, the Soviet Union agreed to build a number of projects for Burma including a 200-bed hospital. This was nominally extended as a "gift" but in fact is a long-term credit with repayment to be made in rice over a period of years.

Cambodia: The Soviet Union is constructing a 500-bed hospital for Cambodia. Construction was started in May of 1958 accompanied by official ceremonies that were well covered by press and radio.

Nepal: The USSR offered a 50-bed hospital as a "birthday gift" to King Mahendra during his visit to the Soviet Union in the spring of 1958. The hospital would be built and staffed by Russian

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personnel. If the offer is accepted it would pave the way for the entry of the first Russian technicians into Nepal.

Libya: The Libyan government has recently accepted an offer by the USSR to extend financial assistance for the construction of two hospitals. The Soviets have also offered to equip and staff the hospitals. However, because of the King's opposition to the Soviet hospital project, its implementation has been delayed indefinitely.

Besides the projects and offers mentioned above there have been a number of other less important efforts of this kind in other countries. East Germany has been awarded a contract to equip a 150-bed hospital in Qunaitra, Syria. However, there is no indication of the terms of the contract and it is not known whether credit is being extended or technical assistance supplied. During the recent cholera and smallpox epidemic in East Pakistan, the USSR donated a considerable quantity of vaccines and medical equipment as well as the services of five public health specialists. Yemen has also been a recipient of Bloc assistance in this field. There are probably eight Czech doctors working there and perhaps as many as twenty Soviet doctors also are present. Ethiopia has long had a hospital at Addis Ababa staffed by Russian personnel. Several years ago there was some indication that the USSR intended to expand this hospital, but so far nothing is being done to accomplish this.